



MTO 25.4 Examples: Duinker, Plateau Loops and Hybrid Tonics in Recent Pop Music

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.4/mto.19.25.4.duinker.html>

Example 1. Basic chord loop used in “Something Just Like This” (The Chainsmokers & Coldplay, 2017). Here and in subsequent examples, chords are labeled in lead sheet-style notation, and are occasionally supplemented with Roman numeral labels. Tonal centers are indicated where relevant.

Tonal center: D

The musical notation shows a piano accompaniment for a 4/4 time signature in the key of D major. The piece consists of two measures. The first measure contains two chords: G add 9 and A add 4. The second measure contains two chords: Bm7 and A add 4. The notation is written on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The bass line is particularly simple, often playing single notes or dyads that support the chords above.

G add 9 A add 4 Bm7 A add 4

Example 2. Various techniques for expressing tonal center in popular music, adapted from Doll's (2017) 13 types of centric information

Centric Information (Doll 2017)	Melodic Expression of Tonal Center
<i>Repetition</i>	Melody repeatedly emphasizes $\hat{1}$
<i>Duration</i>	$\hat{1}$ pitches are held longer than others
<i>Penultima</i>	Melody emphasizes $\hat{2}$ or $\hat{7}$, with the expectation that $\hat{1}$ will occur next
<i>Schema</i>	Melody expresses directed motion toward $\hat{1}$
<i>Scale</i>	Melody expresses a given scale or mode
<i>Arpeggiation</i>	Triadic and other arpeggiations can suggest a tonal center
	Harmonic Expression of Tonal Center
<i>Repetition</i>	Harmony repeats chord functioning as tonic
<i>Duration</i>	Tonic chords are held longer than others
<i>Penultima</i>	Harmony emphasizes chords that normally move next to tonic
<i>Schema</i>	Harmony uses common chord progressions or loops
<i>Meter</i>	Tonic chords occur in metrically and hypermetrically strong positions
<i>Arpeggiation</i>	Triadic and other arpeggiations can suggest a tonal center
	Supplemental Expression of Tonal Center
<i>Pedal</i>	Tonic pedal note in any register

Example 3. End of the bridge (or link section—see de Clercq 2012, 99–109) of “Something Just Like This.” Despite several occurrences of D chords in the harmonic layer, the arrival of the first G chord in the bottom system rhetorically acts as tonic.

Post-bridge (3:06)

Oh I want some-thing just like

Tonal center: D D/F# (I) _____ A sus4 (V) _____ Bm (vi) _____ G (IV) _____ D (I) _____ A (V) _____ D (I) _____ A (V) _____

Chorus

this

G add9 (IV) _____ A add4 (V) _____ Bm7 (vi) _____ A add4 (V) _____ *sim.*

Example 4. Types of plateau loops, model loop types, and characteristic examples of each

Plateau loop type	Chordal content	Example
open passing loop	IV – V – vi	“Perth” (Bon Iver, 2011) “It’s A Slime” (Young Thug & Lil’ Uzi Vert, 2018) “33 ‘God’” (Bon Iver, 2016)
circular passing loop	IV – V – vi – V	“Something Just Like This” (The Chainsmokers & Coldplay, 2017) “Honest” (The Chainsmokers, 2017) “Closer” (The Chainsmokers ft. Halsey, 2016)
ascending passing loop	IV – V – vi – I (or I6, iii, or iii7)	“I’ll Show You” (Justin Bieber, 2015) “Dancing With a Stranger” (Sam Smith & Normani, 2019) “Body” (Loud Luxury ft. Brando, 2017) “Tornado” (Jónsi, 2010) “Stardust” (Ásgeir, 2017) “Fortress” (Bloc Party, 2016) “715-CREEKS” (Bon Iver, 2016)
open neighboring loop	IV – vi – V	“Sorry” (Justin Bieber, 2015) “Icey” (Young Thug, 2018) “Night Sky” (CHVRCHES, 2013) “Nights Like This” (Kehlani ft. Ty Dolla \$ign, 2019)
closed neighboring loop	IV – vi – V – I6 (or iii, iii7, rarely I)	“Where are Ü Now?” (Skrillex, Diplo, & Justin Bieber, 2015) “Hurts So Good” (Astrid S., 2015) “Paris” (The Chainsmokers, 2017) “Heal Me” (Lady Gaga, 2018) “Unbound” (Ásgeir, 2017) “Midnight City” (M83, 2011)
plateau shuttle	IV – V	“Secrets” (The Weeknd, 2017) “Livewire” (Oh Wonder, 2015) “Claudia Lewis” (M83, 2011)

Example 5. Modification of Harrison’s (1994) rhetorical techniques of tonic function for use with popular music, including representative song examples

Rhetorical Tonic Technique (Harrison)	Rhetorical Tonic Technique (Duinker)	Example
tonic function ends a composition	a song’s final chord can assume tonic function	“Perth” (Bon Iver, 2011)
tonic function begins compositional sections	chords that begin song sections can assume tonic function	“Something Just Like This”
harmonic stasis and immobility attract tonic function	harmonic stasis and immobility attract tonic function	“Fortress” (Bloc Party, 2016)
thematic exposition is heard in a tonic context	chords supporting a cadential melodic ^1 can be heard in a tonic context	“Something Just Like This”

Example 6. Ending of “Perth” (Bon Iver, 2011). Despite the tonal center of E \flat , the concluding A \flat chord rhetorically acts as tonic. The penultimate chord annotation is supplemented with a question mark for its ambiguousness. (For context, audio begins approximately 7 seconds before transcription.)

End of outro (3:47)

Tonal center: E \flat Fm add 2 (ii) _____ Cm add 2 (vi) _____ E \flat add 2 (I) _____ B \flat (V?)_ add 2 _ A \flat add 2 (IV) _

Example 7. Chord loop used in “Fortress” (Bloc Party, 2016). The loop-initiating and ending IV chords invoke a sense of stasis that attracts rhetorical tonic function.

Tonal center: B

E (IV) _____ F# (V) _ G#m (vi) _____ B (I) _____ E (IV) _____

Example 8. Chorus melody of “Paris” (The Chainsmokers, 2017) underpinned by a closed neighboring loop. Hybrid tonics are shown in boxes.

Chorus 2 (1:17)

Tonal center: D

G (IV) _____ Bm (vi) _____

if we go down then we go down to - ge - ther they'll

A add4 (V) _____ F#m7 (iii) _____

say you could do an - y - thing they'll say that I was cle - ver if

Example 9a. Introduction and first verse of “Hurts so Good” (Astrid S., 2015)

Intro (0:03) Verse 1

you fight me off _ like a fi-re-fight - er so tell me why you still get _ burned you

Tonal center: B \flat E \flat (IV) Gm (vi) F (V) Dm (iii) E \flat (IV) Gm (vi) F (V) Dm (iii)

Example 9b. Chorus of “Hurts so Good” (Astrid S., 2015). Hybrid tonics are shown in boxes.

Chorus 1 (0:42)

when it hurts, but it hurts so good do you take it? do you break it off? when it hurts,

Tonal center: B \flat E \flat (IV) Gm (vi) F (V) Dm (iii)

Example 10a. Chorus of “Heal Me” (Lady Gaga, 2018). Hybrid tonics are shown in boxes.

Chorus (0:45)
Tonal center: C

Heal me God knows no-thing else is gon - na gon-na heal me oh be-fore it's too _late won't you

F (IV) Am (vi) G (V) Em (iii) F (IV) Am (vi) G (V) Em (iii)

Example 10b. First verse of “Heal Me.” The Am chords are labeled in parentheses because of their brevity—the chord progression could be interpreted as a plateau shuttle between F and G.

Verse 1 (0:11)
Tonal center: C

treat me like your pa-tient just _ don't keep me wait-ing or _ I'll just be wast-ed in the crowd of the lone-ly

F (IV) (Am) G (V) (Am) G (V)

Example 11a. Second verse of “Dancing with a Stranger” (Sam Smith and Normani, 2019)

Verse 2 (1:12)

I was-n't e-ven go-ing out to-night but boy I need to get you off my mind I know ex-act-ly what I

Tonal center: A \flat

D \flat (IV) _____ E \flat (V) _____ Fm (vi) _____ A \flat (I) _____

Example 11b. Chorus of “Dancing with a Stranger”

Chorus 2 (1:32)

Look what you made me do I'm with some-bo-dy new oh ba-by ba-by I'm danc - ing with a stran-ger

Tonal center: A \flat

D \flat (IV) _____ E \flat (V) _____ Fm (vi) _____ A \flat (I) _____

Example 12. Chorus of "Nights Like This" (Kehlani ft. Ty Dolla \$ign, 2019)

Chorus (0:40)

On some nights like this shaw-ty I can't help but think of us I've been re-mi-nis-cin' sip-pin' miss-in' ya

Tonal center: E \flat A \flat (IV) _____ Cm (vi) _____ B \flat (V) _____

can you tell me what's with all this dis-tant love? if I called would you pick it up?

A \flat (IV) _____ Cm (vi) _____ Gm (iii) _____

Example 13a. Three harmonic/melodic motives that generate form in "715 - CRΣΣKS" (Bon Iver, 2016). Formal sections are listed below, with indication of which motives they use.

Motive "A" Motive "B" Motive "C"

Harmony: D \flat Fm A \flat /C D \flat D \flat Fm D \flat Fm A \flat /C D \flat

Section 1 (0:00 – 0:23): A, B, B, unique ending
Section 2 (0:24 – 0:49): A, B, B, unique ending
Section 3 (0:50 – 1:28): A, B, B, B (extended and modified), unique ending
Section 4 (1:29 – 1:52): B, B, B (extended and modified), unique ending
Section 5 (1:53 – ff): C, C, C (each modified from model)

Example 13b. Ending of "715 - CRΣΣKS." Rhythmic transcription of this rubato passage is meant primarily as a guide and is inexact in some places.

(1:53)

Turn a-round you're my A ____ team. Turn a-round now you're my A team. God damn turn a-round now you're my A ____ team.

Tonal center: A \flat Fm (vi) E \flat (V) A \flat /C (I) D \flat (IV) Fm (vi) A \flat /C D \flat (IV) E \flat (V) A \flat /C (I) D \flat (IV)

Example 14a. Main instrumental loop used in “Midnight City” (M83, 2012). All parts represent chords, melodies, and ostinati created by synthesizers.

G Bm A Em D

Example 14b. Second verse, “Midnight City”; the vocal melody never reaches the assumed tonal center of D on a strong beat, and only reaches the other possible center of B on one downbeat, over a G chord.

Verse 2 (1:13)

wait-ing in the car wait-ing for the ride in the dark

Tonal center: D G (IV) Bm7 (vi) A (V) Em add 2 (ii) D (I)

drink-ing in the lights fol-low-ing the ne-on signs

G (IV) Bm7 (vi) A (V) Em add 2 (ii) D (I)

Example 15. Formal summary of “Tornado” (Jónsi, 2010)

Elapsed Time	Song Section	Harmonic Material	Tonal Center
0:00	intro	F - a	F
0:26	verse 1	F - a	F
0:53	chorus	a - G - F, a - e - F	A
1:14	verse 2	F - G - a - (e)	C or A
2:01	chorus	a - G - F, a - e - F	A
2:22	bridge	d - a - C - G	C
3:06	link	F - G - a	F or C
3:45	second bridge	d - a - C - G - F	C then F

Example 16. First verse of "Tornado"

Verse 1 (0:26)

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in 4/4 time, with lyrics "you grow you roar al -" written below it. The middle and bottom staves are piano accompaniment, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords in the right hand, and a bass line of eighth notes in the left hand.

Tonal center: F F (I) Am (iii)

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal and piano parts. The vocal line has lyrics "- though dis - guised I". The piano accompaniment maintains the same rhythmic and harmonic structure as the first system.

F (I) Am (iii)

Example 17. Chorus of "Tornado"

Chorus (0:53)

8
You'll _____ learn _____

Tonal center: A Am (i) _____ G (VII) _____ F (VI) _____

8
you'll _____ learn _____ to know _____

Am (i) _____ Em (v) _____ F (VI) _____

Example 18. Second verse of "Tornado." Hybrid tonics are shown in boxes.

Verse 2 (1:14)

Tonal center: C

F (IV) _____ G (V) _____ Am (vi) _____ Em (iii) _____

8
you grow _____ you grow like tor - na - do you grow from the

8
in - side _____ des - troy ev - ery - thing through _____ des - troy from the

Example 19. Partial transcription of first bridge of "Tornado"

Bridge (2:24)

I won-der if I'm al-lowed e-ver to see

Tonal center: C Dm (ii) Am (vi) C (I) G (V)

Example 20a. Verse of "Icicy" (Young Thug, 2018). Hybrid tonics are shown in boxes.

Verse 1 (0:12)

woah I told her she got a thug wan-na-be woah De-mon Hell-cat and I'm tear'n up streets

Tonal center: F# B (IV) D#m (vi) C# (V) B (IV) D# (vi) C# (V)

Example 20b. Verse of “It’s A Slime” (Young Thug ft. Lil’ Uzi Vert, 2018)

Verse 2 (1:38)

Musical notation for the verse of "It's A Slime". The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "Uh ain't gon' loveno more pus-sy I-'ma go con-nect I put a Z on a brand new all red long Cor-vette". A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it in the second measure of the melody.

Tonal center: D \flat G \flat (IV) _____ A \flat (V) _____ B \flat m (vi) _____ G \flat (IV) _____ A \flat (V) _____ B \flat (vi) _____

Example 21. Chorus of “Best I Ever Had” (Drake, 2009)

Chorus (0:11)

Musical notation for the first part of the chorus of "Best I Ever Had". The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "ba-by you my e're-thingyou all I e-ver want-ed we could do it real big big-ger than you e-ver done it you be up on". The bass line features a consistent harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass notes.

Tonal center: A \flat D \flat M7 (IV) _____ Cm7 (iii) _____

Musical notation for the second part of the chorus of "Best I Ever Had". The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "e're - thing oth - er hoes ain't ne - ver on it I want this for - e - ver I swear I can spend what - e - ver on it". The bass line continues with the same harmonic accompaniment as the first part.

B \flat m9 (ii) _____